DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 357 094 UD 029 142

TITLE	The Boston Globe's Top 25 Books in Multicultural Reading for Youngsters.
INSTITUTION	Boston Globe Newspaper, MA. Public Relations Dept.
PUB DATE	92
NOTE	5p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Young Reader, Public Relations Department, The Boston Globe, P.O. Box 2378, Boston, MA 02107-2378.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Reference Materials - Bibliographies (131)
JOURNAL CIT	Young Reader; spec iss Aut 1992
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Age Groups; Annotated Bibliographies; Book Reviews; *Books; *Childrens Literature; Cultural Awareness; Cultural Differences; *Cultural Pluralism; Elementary Education; Elementary School Students; Folk Culture; *Multicultural Education; Novels; Picture Books; United States History
IDENTIFIERS	*Multicultural Materials

ABSTRACT

This issue of a newsletter about children and reading briefly describes 25 of the best choices in multicultural children's literature. The list includes picture books and novels for young readers. Each book review provides author, illustrator, and publisher names; the title; the age for which the book is appropriate; and a description of the plot and illustrations. The list includes books in the following cultures: (1) Eskimo; (2) Caribbean; (3) African American; (4) Hispanic American; (5) Ukrainian; (6) Chinese; (7) Middle Eastern; (8) Jewish; (9) Native American; (10) Korean; (11) Cambodian; and (12) Turkish. (JB)

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The Young Reader

A newsletter about children and reading published by The Boston Globe.

Special Issue
Autumn 1992

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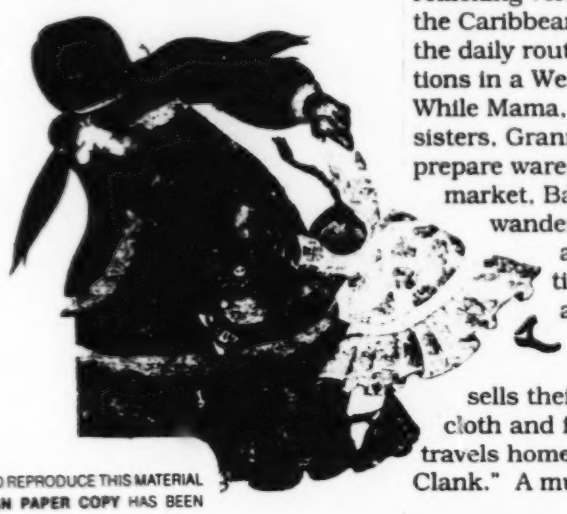
A Special Reprint

The Boston Globe's Top 25 books in multicultural reading for youngsters

Cultural diversity is one of the most exciting areas in today's children's literature. Here are the Boston Globe's Top 25 choices in multicultural books, selected by Children's Book Editor Stephanie Loer.

Mama Do You Love Me?



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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Mama Do You Love Me?, by Barbara Joosse. Illustrated by Barbara Lavallee. Chronicle Books (2-5).The question asked by all children who seek reassurance that a parent's love is unconditional and forever. Asked here by an Inuit Eskimo child, and the theme is developed in a framework of Inuit culture. A two-page illustrated glossary provides information about Inuit culture and featured animals.

Baby-O, by Nancy White Carlstrom. Illustrated by Sucie Stevenson. Little Brown. (3-7). In rollicking verse, with speech of the Caribbean, this tale recounts the daily routine of three generations in a West Indian family. While Mama, Papa, brothers, sisters, Granny and Pappy prepare wares and produce for market, Baby-O, the youngest, wanders in and out of their activities. The repetitive chorus continues as the family climbs aboard a jitney, bounces into town, sells their baskets, chickens, cloth and fish, and at sunset travels home. "Putta Putta Clank Clank." A must read-aloud.

How My Family Lives in America, written and photographed by Susan Kuklin. Bradbury (4-8). Readers meet Sanu, an African-American; Eric, a Hispanic-American; and April, a Chinese-American. Through these children's eyes, we see how different families preserve their cultures while part of an American community. In songs, stories, games, language and special celebrations, members of each family incorporate time-honored traditions into their daily lives. Non-English words are explained. As a special treat, recipes used by the three families are included.

Abuela, by Arthur Dorros. Illustrated by Elisa Kleven. Dutton (4-9). A rare picture book that moves easily from reality to fantasy. Young Rosalba accompanies her Abuela (grandmother) on journeys that carry them through and above New York City. Abuela speaks Spanish because that's what people spoke where she grew up and one of the things Rosalba loves about Abuela. Rosalba describes their flights of fancy in English; Abuela interjects Spanish phrases (a glossary is included for translation). A celebration of a relationship between grandmother and granddaughter.

Jamal's Busy Day, by Wade Hudson. Illustrated by George Ford. Just Us Books (5-8). Author and illustrator are African-Americans, lending realism to the text and pictures depicting the lives of a close black family. The family shares breakfast, Daddy goes to his job as an architect, Mommy works as an accountant, and the narrator, Jamal, goes off to school. All return home to share dinner together and talk about their busy days.

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Multicultural

Sam

Sam, by Ann Herbert Scott. Illustrated by Symeon Shimin. Philomel (4-8). An early staple of multiethnic works is back in print. The protagonist is young Sam, who, when at loose ends, tries to enlist the attention of family members - to no avail. Suddenly he breaks into tears, and the family rushes to help Sam find a special job he can do and feel helpful. A universal family situation that comes to life in an African-American family.

Borreguita and the Coyote: a Tale from Ayulta Mexico, by Verna Aardema. Illustrated by Petra Mathers. Knopf (5-10). Borreguita (little lamb) is small but clever. With cunning, she holds the coyote (who wants to make a meal of her) at bay. In her last ploy, she deftly gives the coyote "one big toothache" and is never bothered again. A tale from western Mexico, and Mather's illustrations brightly reflect the area's landscapes, native foliage and elements of Mexican folk art.

Eskimo Boy: Life in an Inupiaq Eskimo Village, written and photographed by Russ Kendall. Scholastic. (5-8). Norman Kokeok, 7, is an American boy and an Inupiaq Eskimo. He lives in Shishmaref, on an island in the Bering Strait where his people have lived for more than 4,000 years. Exceptional photographs and a clear text give authenticity to a lifestyle that combines traditions with modern conveniences. A glossary of Inupiaq words is included. In a thoughtful afterword, the author explains the history of the various people who consider themselves Native Alaskans.

The Jewish Child's First Book of Why, by Alfred J. Kolatch. Illustrated by Harry Araten. Jonathan David Publishers (5-9). A sensible book for Jewish and non-Jewish children. A question about different Jewish traditions and celebrations is asked on each page; answers are short and informative. A fine classroom supplement for elementary grades discussing different religions and cultures.

Amazing Grace, by Mary Hoffman. Illustrated by Caroline Binch. Dial (5-10). Young Grace loves to act; she can be anything from King Arthur to Anansi the Spider. But classmates object to her role as Peter Pan in the school play because she is a girl and is black. Grace's Nana takes her to see an African-American performance of Romeo and Juliet and affirms "you can be anything you want, Grace, if you put your mind to it." Grace wins the role and plays an amazing Peter Pan. The illustrations are as amazing as Grace.

Chicken Sunday, written and illustrated by Patricia Polacco. Philomel (5-9). Based on experiences growing up in a multiethnic neighborhood, Polacco's story is a tribute to memories that grow from the images of childhood. It's also a gift from the author to the Washington family - Stuart, Winston and Miss Eula - "who so lovingly shared their lives with me when I was young." Miss Eula, Stuart and Winston's grandmother, often took the children to church and then cooked them Sunday dinner. To thank her, the children decide to buy an Easter bonnet at Mr. Kodinski's shop, but plans go awry when Mr. Kodinski wrongly suspects the kids of causing trouble. To make amends, the children decorate eggs in the Slavic style with hot wax and dye (the author is Ukranian) and present them to him. All is forgiven, the hat is bought, and Miss Eula is resplendent in her new pink bonnet when she and the children attend church.

Chicken Sunday

Multicultural

Dragon Kite of the Autumn Moon, by Valerie Reddix. Illustrated by Jean and Mou-sien Tseng. Lothrop (5-9). Based on ancient Chinese tradition, a contemporary Taiwanese story juxtaposes reality and fantasy in a believeable sequence. For as long as he can remember, Tad-Tin's grandfather made a special kite for Kite Day. After flying it all day, grandfather would cut the string and say, "Go now and carry all our misfortune away." This year, grandfather is ill. As a tribute to the elderly man, Tad-Tin decides to fly his own dragon kite that's hung above his bed since he was born. With a heavy heart, he cuts the string, says goodbye to his beloved kite and returns home to discover the magical dragon did carry the family's misfortune away.

The Day of Ahmed's Secret, by Florence Parry Heide and Judith Heide Gilliland. Illustrated by Ted Lewin. Lothrop (5-8). Young Ahmed has a secret, and at day's end he'll share it with his family. But during the day, he works hard delivering tanks of butane gas, driving a donkey-drawn cart through the streets of Cairo. Readers are treated to the sights of a city where old cultures and new ways coexist. Camels compete with cars on the road, and men in caftans bargain with those in baseball caps and jeans. In the evening, a proud Ahmed holds out a piece of paper and says to his family, "Look, I have something to show you. Look, I can write my name."

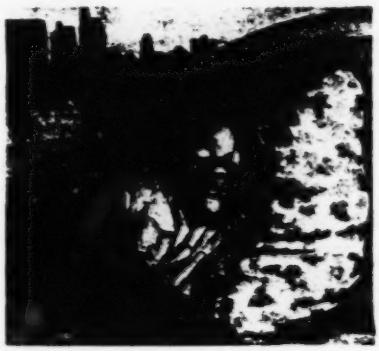
Going West, by Jean Van Leeuwen. Illustrated by Thomas B. Allen. Dial (5-8). The journeys of America's covered wagons could be anybody's multicultural slice of life. This trip toward a new life in the west was made by people from many ethnic backgrounds. Narrated by 7-year-old Hannah, who recalls the sadness of leaving relatives, the hope for prosperity, discomforts along the way and the struggle to make a new home on the prairie.

Mrs. Katz and Tush, written and illustrated by Patricia Polacco. Bantam (5-9). Young Larnel and his African-American family befriend a widowed neighbor, Mrs. Katz. A relationship bridging generations and cultures begins when Larnel finds a baby kitten and Mrs. Katz adopts it - on the condition that he help out with Tush (named because the cat has no tail). While looking after the kitten, Larnel learns about the Katz family's adventures when they came to America from Poland. He also learns that Jewish and black history share common themes of suffering and triumph. When Larnel asks if he can come to Mrs. Katz's Passover dinner, she exclaims, "I thought you would never ask!" The next day, Tush has four kittens, and Mrs. Katz declares, "The angel of death passed over, the angel of life didn't - at last I am a bubee!" (grandmother).

The House I Live In: At Home in America, written and illustrated by Isadore Seltzer. Macmillan (7-11). A different approach to the many people living in the U.S. The author describes types of houses built throughout the country - from pueblos to log cabins. Each illustration is accompanied by a photograph of the child who makes his or her home there. This is a wonderful history and perspective about the different houses of the American landscape, and interesting profiles of the kids who live in them.

Night on Neighborhood Street, by Eloise Greenfield. Illustrated by Jan Spivey Gilchrist. Dial (6-12). Poems with portraits in gouache highlighted in soft pastels evoke a sense of community in an urban African-American neighborhood. The verses celebrate the joys and sadness of everyday life and convey feelings of affection among family members. A beautiful tribute to solidarity among neighbors.

Night on Neighborhood Street



Thirteen Moons on Turtle's Back: A Native American Year of Moons, by Joseph Bruchac and Jonathan London. Illustrated by Thomas Locker. Philomel (8-14). In many Native-American tribal cultures, people relate the 13 yearly cycles of the moon to the seasons. A turtle's shell also has 13 scales - the reason why a turtle is sometimes pictured as carrying the world. This original collection of poems describes the moons in the folklore of different native nations. Locker's rich oil paintings dramatically show the changing seasons.

Multicultural

American Tall Tales, retold by Mary Pope Osborne. Illustrated by Michael McCurdy. Knopf (8-up). A stunning, oversized edition. Readers meet nine characters of American literary history: some based on real people, like Davy Crockett and Johnny Appleseed, others from yarns passed from one generation to the next, and some literary inventions of early writers. The stories abound with humor, rich language and heritage.

Now Is Your Time: The African-American Struggle for Freedom, by Walter Dean Myers. Illustrated with photographs. HarperCollins (11-up). Myers' introduction: "The African-American experience cannot be told in one story or even in a hundred, for it is a living experience, ever changing, ever growing, ever becoming richer." His narrative reflects that rich tapestry of the African-American experience, and Myers storytelling is a shining thread weaving together the lives of people and their stories about the struggle for freedom. Thoroughly researched, the book has been acclaimed as one of the finest for young people about the subject.

Rosa Parks, My Story, by Rosa Parks with Jim Haskins. Dial (11-up). In 1955, Parks refused to give a white man her seat on a bus in Alabama, turning the civil rights movement into a national cause. Her conviction led to the Montgomery bus boycott and then to the 1956 Supreme Court decision declaring segregation unconstitutional. Parks has collaborated with Jim Haskins, and for the first time recounted the events that led to her decision on the bus. The story of this brave woman raises awareness about injustice, hatred and morality - issues we still confront.

The Year of Impossible Goodbyes, by Sook Nyul Choi. Houghton Mifflin (11-16). Born during the Japanese rule of Korea, the protagonist, Sookan, and her brother, Inchun, have known life only under occupation. When the Japanese cast their lot with the Axis powers, Koreans were forced to work under impossible conditions for the war effort. Secretly, Grandfather teaches the children about their Korean heritage, and Sookan hopes peace will return, so they can practice their own customs. The war ends, and the Japanese are driven out, but rejoicing turns to remorse when the superpowers divide the country, and Russian troops establish a new regime in North Korea. The family decides escape is their only future. But as they begin the trek, the children are separated from their mother. Sookan and Inchun make their escape to freedom and are ultimately reunited with their family.

The Clay Marble, by Minfong Ho. Farrar, Straus & Giroux (12-16). In 1980, 12-year-old Dara and her family are forced by a war she does not understand to leave their Cambodian village and seek refuge in a camp near the Thai border. At the camp, she and her friend Jantu play games and hope for peace. Jantu gives a clay marble to Dara, who believes it is magic. When bombings at the camp again disperse her family and kill Jantu, Dara gathers them together and devises a plan to return to their home. Dara realizes the magic is not in the marble but in her own strength. A powerful account that makes readers wonder how many children have lived similar stories.

Against the Storm, by Gaye Hiçyilmaz. Little Brown (12-up). Mehmet, 12, moves with his family from a rural village to Ankara, Turkey, hoping to find a better life. Seeking help from a relative, they realize too late the uncle takes advantage of them and robs them of their dignity. Mehmet sees daily the toll that poverty and ignorance take on those living in squalor in the city. Only after he loses a close friend in an accident does he become his own person and wisely returns to his village - alone. There is much despair in this story, yet by learning to cope with it, Mehmet learns to hope.

Tongues of Jade, by Laurence Yep. Illustrated by David Wiesner. HarperCollins (11-16). In a companion volume to *The Rainbow People*, the author has retold Chinese folktales in a style accessible to the audience. The book is divided into thematic sections with an introduction to each that lets the reader interpret the meaning and significance of the stories better.

Reader's Note

This list originally appeared in the Spring '92 issue of The Young Reader, a quarterly newsletter about children and reading published by The Boston Globe. Contents copyrighted by The Boston Globe and may not be reproduced without written permission. Comments are welcome. Write: The Young Reader, Public Relations Department, The Boston Globe, P.O. Box 2378, Boston, Mass. 02107-2378. Printed on recycled paper.